

can be made changeable to some extent.

In other words, the five monitor devices MDa, MDb, MDc, MDd, and MDe arranged in this order do not display the participants HMa, HMb, HMc, HMd, and HMe in a fixed manner, and the relationship between the monitor devices and the participants is made changeable.

With this feature, when a group is formed among participants, the seating order can be changed according to the formed group. When the user of the terminal and the participants HMb and HMd form a group, for example, if the seating order is changed such that the monitor device MDa displays the participants HMb and the monitor device MDb displays the participants HMd, the group is made to have a convenient condition for their conversation.

The seating order is changed, for example, by the seating-order-changing operations of the user. It is not realistic that the user performs a seating-order changing operation according to a group formed or released during a conference. This means that the user needs to perform a very troublesome operation. In addition, especially during a conference, the user wants to concentrate on the conference without performing any operations. Furthermore, a terminal user is not necessarily familiar with operations.

It can be considered that a system operator is assigned to seating-order-changing operations. It is also

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unrealistic, however, because extra man-power is required, and an operator usually cannot correctly understand conversation groups which always change their participants.

With the above-described reasons, even in a system which allows a seating order to be changed, the feature is usually not utilized.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention has been made in consideration of the foregoing points. It is an object of the present invention to provide a communication system, such as a teleconference system, a communication device, a seating-order determination device, a communication method, a recording medium, a group-determination-table generating method, and a group-determination-table generating device, in which a seating order can be appropriately changed according to conversations which flexibly progress among participants to provide a more suitable communication-conversation environment.

The foregoing object is achieved in one aspect of the present invention through the provision of a communication system including at least three communication devices, and a seating-order determination device for generating seating-order information at each point of time for information sent from each communication device and for transmitting the

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seating-order information to each communication device.

Each communication device may control the output position of the information sent from other communication devices, according to the seating-order information to output the information sent from the other communication devices in a seating order corresponding to the seating-order information.

In this case, the seating order is always automatically changed to the most appropriate condition according to the progress of a conference and the state of conversations to provide the user with a suitable conference environment and a suitable communication environment.

The seating-order determination device may generate the seating-order information for the information sent from each communication device according to the degree of attention which the user of each communication device pays to the information sent from each communication device. In this case, the most appropriate seating order is implemented.

The seating-order determination device may group the information sent from each communication device according to the degree of attention which each user pays to the information sent from each communication device, and generate the seating-order information according to the result of grouping. In this case, the seating order is automatically changed with conversation groups being taken